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ABSTRACT

The final performance report of Project Learning TIP (To Improve Productivity), a federally-funded program to improve the work-related skills of Dade County, Florida hospital workers, is presented in seven sections. The first outlines specific project objectives for recruitment, literacy gains, course completion, achievement, English language competency, and job performance and compares them to program accomplishments. The second section examines reasons for the discrepancies found between objectives and accomplishments. Section 3 enumerates participant characteristics. Program information dissemination and evaluation activities are described in two subsequent sections. A brief sixth section notes changes in key personnel during the course of the project. In the final section, a significant development that assures the institutionalization of the project, implementation of computerized learning laboratories in two of the three participating hospitals, is discussed. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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FINAL REPORT

Project Learning T.I.P (TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY)

Dade County Public Schools
Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education Center

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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PROJECT LEARNING T.I.P. (TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY)
Final Performance Report

Comparison of Accomplishments and Objectives

1. The hospital partners will recruit persons currently in their employ whom they identify as lacking the necessary literacy skills and basic education necessary to achieve the maximum productivity on the job.

Surveys conducted by the project developers and interviews with hospital personnel offices indicated that as many as 4,000 workers (at one hospital 80% of their ancillary service workers) were limited English proficient (LEP) and/or lacked the basic educational skills specified in their job description.

For several months before the program opened the first classroom, and throughout the first year of operation, Learning TIP staff members assisted the hospitals in developing recruiting activities. These activities included posters, newsletter articles, announcements at various hospital staff meetings, and, in many cases, personal interviews by hospital supervisory staff.

2. Adult literacy exit scores of 85% of the participants completing literacy instruction in the Learning TIP program will be a minimum of three grade levels above their entrance scores.

Class records kept by the project director indicate that the following levels of reading improvement have been achieved by the program participants to the time of this writing:

21% improved by at least one grade level.
57% improved by at least two grade levels.
07% improved by at least three grade levels.
14% improved by less than one grade level.

An unforeseen measurement difficulty was the frequent and rapid turnover of worker-students. Since extrapolation of learning data is risky, reading improvement was measured only in terms of the time each student spent in the program.

3. At least 60% of the participants who study high school courses or GED preparation will attain passing scores in their class work. Of those candidates for GED certification who have completed the GED preparation course, at least 70% will pass the examination.

Based on project records, 44% of the students who enrolled in GED classes actually took the exam, and half of those who took the test passed it.

4. Minimum English language competency levels for the specific health care area in which each works will be achieved by non-native English speakers who complete the workplace ESOL or accent reduction program.

Surveys and interviews by workplace literacy staff members of hospital management indicate that accent reduction classes were particularly effective. Most appreciative were native-born nursing staff who sometimes had difficulty understanding verbal instructions from foreign-born MDs. Though this was one of the most successful elements of the program, it is also one of the most difficult to quantify, since there is no really effective tool for measuring accent reduction.

5. Adult literacy exit scores of 90% of the limited English proficient students completing literacy instruction will be one full grade level above their entrance scores.

Based on project records, 54% of the LEPs who were tested increased their literacy level by one grade level. A major difficulty in accurately measuring student progress was the high job turnover and the resultant short time in the program.

6. Surveys using a Likert scale evaluation instrument will verify the impact of the program on the job performance of the participants.

Based on surveys of participants and supervisors, the program was an outstanding success. Likert techniques of evaluation, however, proved to be difficult to accomplish since the uniqueness of the program made comparisons impossible. Here is a sampling of remarks that came back from one questionnaire that was sent out:

"I can understand what I read for the first time."
"Now I answer the phone in my department.
"I can use the computer to order supplies for my department."
"I can help patients better."
"I feel more confident when I have to read or write."
"I got a higher position."
"It gave me the boost I needed."
"I can understand the newspaper, magazines, and TV for the first time."
"I feel better about myself."
"It helps me to work, at home and at church."

Discrepancies Between Objectives and Accomplishments

The most severe difficulty in meeting project objectives occurred in the area of participant recruitment. Of the large target group, only a relative few enrolled and continued in the program. Under the partnership agreement, responsibility for recruitment was to be primarily that of the hospitals' employee development staffs. In all cases, these departments were already struggling with full workloads and received no additional personnel or other resources to implement the project.

During the project period, all three partner hospitals laid off employees in an attempt to cut costs. There were sweeping organizational changes. Shifts were extended and re-arranged to maintain the same levels of service with reduced staffs. Official or unofficial release time for classes was severely curtailed. In an atmosphere of uncertain job security, many individuals were reluctant to focus attention on their lack of basic skills.

In order to increase project participation, it was necessary for the school to take over some of the recruiting functions. Project staff members as well as counselors, teachers, aides, registration clerks and other school employees who were not connected with the project spent numerous hours on recruiting efforts using various approaches.

Through staff development specialists, an attempt was made to set up classes by department in two of the three hospitals. Although supervisors supported the concept and worked with the project staff to develop specialized curriculum, only a few students were interested and the classes were canceled. A few of these students transferred to the ongoing classes open to all employees.

It was thought that coverage in mainstream newspapers and on television might attract more students. A Literacy Open House featuring U.S. Congressional Representative Dante Fascell and State Senator Carrie Meek was held. Although it was not the "media event" that had been anticipated, and produced few new enrollments, the open house did provide an excellent showcase for the program.

Project Participants and Outcomes

Two hundred and one employees of the three hospitals enrolled in the classes and 154 of these attended enough sessions to be considered participants. Of that number, 83 were considered completers because they remained in the program for one or more 14-week enrollment periods or achieved a significant career goal such as passing the GED Examination or admission to a desired training program such as the Licensed Practical Nursing Program.

Eighty-five of the participants were black, 63 were Hispanic, 4 were non-Hispanic white, and 2 were Asian. Ages of all participants (as of January 1, 1990) were distributed as follows: Age 16-24, 5; Age 25-44, 89; Age 45-59, 57; Age 60 and older, 3. Twenty-five males and 129 females enrolled in one or more classes. Ninety-six percent of the participants were black or Hispanic.

Females were the great majority (129 of 154) of students and had a higher completion rate. Fifty-eight percent of the females were completers compared to 32% of the males. Those in the older major age group, 45-60, were more likely to be completers (61%) than those aged 25-44 at 49%. Sixty-one percent of the black participants were completers while 43% of the Hispanics were. This undoubtedly reflects the focused nature of the GED and pre-nursing classes.

After the conclusion the project, 31 participants continued their education at Lindsey Hopkins or at the satellite learning labs described in the last section. At least fifteen of the 154 participants achieved a significant career advancement during the program period. Milestones such as admission to a selective training program such as the LPN program, passing a professional or technical examination (ei. pathology), earning a GED diploma, or getting a promotion are examples of such

advancements. The increase self-esteem and improved job performance experienced by participants are harder to quantify.

Dissemination Activities

Information about the program has been shared primarily through participation and presentations at professional conferences and meetings. Presentations about the program were made at the 1989 Florida Literacy Council Conference, the 1989 Commission on Adult Basic Education Conference, the 1989 Florida Vocational Association Association Workshop (Special Needs Section), and the International Reading Association Conference on Adult and Adolescent Literacy. The project director participated in workplace literacy panel discussions at the Florida Adult Education/Continuing Education Association Conference and the 1990 Florida Literacy Coalition Conference.

Locally, staff members have participated in many community organizations meetings and given brief explanations about the program. There have been appearances on local radio and television. Partner hospitals have featured the program in their employee newsletters and articles have appeared in the Miami Herald.

Reports of the program and copies of the Workplace English curriculum developed as part of the project will be submitted to the Curriculum Coordination Center Network and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education.

Evaluation Activities

The problems of student evaluation in a project of this nature were evident. The frustrations of using standardized tests with this populuation have plagued the project from the start. Initially, the ELSA test was used to evaluate ESOL students. When the first term results showed few of the gains that we knew students had made, we changed to the BEST test. This showed better results at the lower levels but was not satisfactory to use with educated professionals in the accent reduction classes. Teacher progress reports were made at the end of each enrollment period and proved to be of value mostly for providing feedback to students. A student survey was conducted at mid-point in the project. It showed a high degree of satisfaction with the instruction and the curriculum. An attempt was made to contact each student who dropped out of class to determine the reason. If the student could not be contacted, we talked to classmates or other hospital personnel. Reasons for non-completion given were: changes in shift, family responsibilities, enrollment in college or university programs, and loss of job. Both the student survey and the drop-out follow-up should be seen in the friendly perspective that characterized student-project staff relations throughout the program.

External evaluation was conducted by Dr. Joan E. Friedenberg, Ph.D. in April of 1990. In her summation, Dr. Friedenberg observes, "'Learning TIP' is a unique program which serves a vital role in Dade County, Florida and, perhaps, our nation...it has helped (hospital) employees increase their language, literacy, and other basic skills; it has provided (hospital) employees with computer literacy and key-

boarding skills; and it appears to have helped many of these adults gain more self-confidence and higher self-esteem."

Changes in Key Personnel

Although the project maintained the same director and lead teacher throughout the project period. For reasons unrelated to the project, the curriculum specialist took a leave of absence from the system and the secretary assigned to the project transferred to another school. Replacement of these individuals was difficult and, in the case of the secretary, not completely satisfactory. There was also considerable turnover of part time teachers. In addition, the employee development specialist responsible for the project at the largest partner hospital resigned midway through the project and was not replaced for eight months.

Significant Development

The institutionalization of the project has been assured through the implementation of computerized learning laboratories in two of the three hospitals. (The third hospital partner did not wish to dedicate space so their employees attend the laboratory at the neighboring partner.) An important element of this program is on-site instruction, and to assure the maximum impact of this instruction, it was felt that laboratories (set up in the same manner and with the same equipment as that used at LHTEC) should be installed at hospital teaching sites. Consequently, two fully operational computer laboratories were set up, one at Mt. Sinai on Miami Beach and another at Jackson Memorial, located on the mainland in the middle of the Dade hospital complex. These labs include two specially-designed computers with wide, touch-screen monitors and attached 12-inch laser-disk players. These machines are capable of running the IBM PALS "Story of the Alphabet" literacy program. There are two printers and ten dual-drive computers. In addition to the "Story of the Alphabet", there is a large collection of teaching disks covering English grammar, vocabulary, idioms, reading, spelling, and mathematics. The software is supplemented by class sets of basic skills and GED books.

These facilities were funded by the Dade County Office of Vocational and Adult Education with only marginal fund support from the project. Learning TIP teachers conducted classes in the Jackson facility until the end of the program. Lindsey Hopkins now provides a part-time teacher. Mt. Sinai provides its own certified teacher. The labs stay open most of every day, so that students who have learned how to use the equipment can study at their convenience. These laboratories are an important and very popular component of the overall Learning TIP program.